

The Song of the Shopkeeper: During the August recess, the captivating Mrs. Campbell and I always go to Carmel for the annual car show. Early one morning up there, I watched several shopkeepers sweeping the sidewalk in front of their stores. I got to thinking that shopkeepers must have been doing this for centuries, if not millennia. Several weeks later, I was down in Fredericksburg, Virginia and watched another shopkeeper carefully rearranging a display in the window. It struck me that these acts represented pride in one's work and one's place of work. No work rules made them do it. They just did it because those shops were theirs and they take pride in what is theirs. And, I thought, it has ever been thus.

When Mr. Obama talks about the economy and jobs, he invariably mentions teachers and firefighters. Fine. Those are noble professions. But, I can't help but think that he does so because teachers and firefighters almost always are employees of some government entity and are almost always compelled by law to join a union as a condition of having the job. And, they pay forced union dues, some of which will be involuntarily sent to the campaign coffers of politicians they do not support. It seems the President favors those who work for the government or are in a union, or preferably, both.

Well, Mr. President, most of America does not work for the government nor are they members of a union. They are salesmen and clerks and mechanics and...yes...shopkeepers. And, their contribution to society is no more or less than that of those other professions.

Now, most of you know that I spent most of my working life in the retail car business. I did that for more than twice as long as I have been serving in politics. Maybe that explains my affinity for the shopkeepers. A car dealership is, after all, a shop.

But, no one ever talks about that guy on the corner selling yogurt or the independent bookstore run by that woman who is still making a go of it in the face of Kindles and such. The shopkeeper has a heck of a job. They take a lot of risks. Signing a lease on the bet that they can sell enough stuff to pay the rent. Choosing what they think you will buy for more money than they paid for it. Figuring out how to spend limited advertising dollars and how to track whether the ads actually bring people to the store. Investing money they saved for years to buy the inventory. Selling at a loss the things that didn't sell the way they thought they might. And, of course, they have to hire employees and do all the paperwork the government requires for taxes and worker's compensation insurance and God knows what else. They often work 6 or 7 days a week, because their shops are usually open all those days. They create a pension by saving enough of what they make. They buy their own health insurance.

Nothing guarantees their job except their own personal effort and industry. They still have a boss - it's called the customer who can put them out of business in a moment.

When others in my current profession talk about their defense of those powerful interests that represent certain professions, I think that's fine for them. But for me, the unsung shopkeeper represents those Americans who take risks, work hard, take care of themselves and maybe someone else too, and want the opportunity to succeed. They are small businesspeople. It is they who make the economy run. And, I hold them up with the greatest of respect. It is they who are ever in my thoughts as I make decisions on those cold and lonely nights in Washington. It is that entrepreneur for whom I fight the daily fight against socialism, blind ideology, and those who would steal their independence and freedom.

So, I sing the song of the shopkeeper. Their job is not a new one. It is as old as civilization. They are our neighbors, friends, and family members. They don't make noise. They make growth. They are a part of the fabric of society. And, their toil is every bit as honorable in God's eyes as anyone else's.

Next time you walk past a clean sidewalk in front of a store, remember that it didn't get that way by itself. Behind those windows, someone is putting their all into what is both their livelihood and one tiny, but critical part of our economy and our way of life. May we give them shelves full of opportunity in the years ahead.